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ABSTRACT

This paper examines issues in gathering data for purposes of making accountability decisions for students with disabilities. The first section describes five alternative methods being used: (1) administration of norm-referenced tests; (2) focus on results or outcomes; (3) Individualized Education Program aggregation; (4) secondary analysis of extant data; and (5) establishment of an accreditation program. The second section looks at the student population and accountability decision-making practices in representative states (Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, and West Virginia). Considered in the third section are the kinds of issues State Education Agency (SEA) personnel encounter and the barriers they run into as they attempt to document educational results--for students in general and especially for those with disabilities. These include agreeing on outcomes and standards, inclusion of students with disabilities in assessments, deciding on how and what to report, determining the role of the state, deciding on sanctions and rewards, and overcoming fear of accountability. The fourth section identifies the kinds of data SEA and national education policy personnel feel are needed to demonstrate that education works for students with disabilities. Section 5 describes ways in which SEA personnel have been successful in overcoming barriers. The paper closes by recommending promising practices for making accountability decisions. (Contains 10 references.) (DB)

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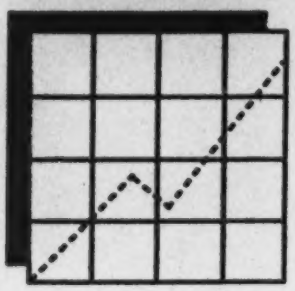

Implementation of Alternative Methods for Making Educational Accountability Decisions for Students with Disabilities

National Center on Educational Outcomes

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

in collaboration with

St. Cloud State University
and
National Association of State Directors of Special Education

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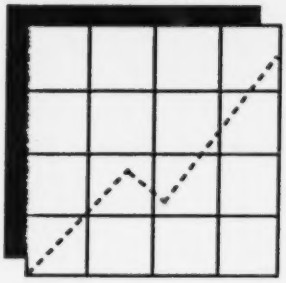

Implementation of Alternative Methods for Making Educational Accountability Decisions for Students with Disabilities

Prepared by:
James Ysseldyke, Martha Thurlow, and Kristin Geenen

National Center on Educational Outcomes

The College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

March, 1994

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), established in 1990, works with state departments of education, national policy-making groups, and others to facilitate and enrich the development and use of indicators of educational outcomes for students with disabilities. It is believed that responsible use of such indicators will enable students with disabilities to achieve better results from their educational experiences. The Center represents a collaborative effort of the University of Minnesota, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, and St. Cloud State University.

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Illinois
Gail Lieberman
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Richard Steinke
Robert Gabrys

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Richard Baldwin
Anne Hansen

West Virginia
Nancy T. Johnson
James Snyder

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Publications Office
NCEO
350 Elliott Hall
75 East River Road
University of Minnesota
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Implementation of Alternative Methods for Making Educational Accountability Decisions for Students with Disabilities

During the past 10 years there has been a major move to reform America's schools. The move has taken on many variations, but in general each of these has been in response to a concern: America's students are not doing as well in school as are students in other nations, and they are not doing as well as they could. At least a portion of school personnel are always engaged in some form of reform, but efforts to reform schools increased significantly following the publication in 1983 of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Over the decade since publication of that report there have been major actions proposed, the most obvious of which were President Bush's America 2000 and now President Clinton's proposed Goals 2000. Explicit in both of these pieces of legislation is the notion that America's schools must get better, that we must hold America's students to higher standards, and that we can have both excellence and equity (all of America's students are to have an opportunity to learn the same high content standards). But, how would we know if this happened?

One of the characteristics most apparent in the school reforms now taking place across the nation is a shift from a focus on documenting the process of educating students to a focus on the outcomes of the educational process. Policymakers, legislators, school administrators, and the general public want to know the extent to which education in America is working. At each level of governance educators are striving to document educational effectiveness, and many different kinds of accountability practices are being used. Accountability typically is defined as "a systemic method to assure those inside and outside the educational system that schools are moving in desired directions (Westat, in press).

The major way of accounting for educational results for America's students has been large-scale testing. Large-scale tests have been used by national agencies (e.g., the tests used as part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress), by state education agencies (either state constructed tests or commercially available norm-referenced measures), and by local education agencies. Individual states have been experimenting with alternative methodologies for demonstrating accountability for individuals and programs (ETS, 1993; Shriner, Spande, & Thurlow, 1994). Among these alternatives are ones that come under the broad heading "authentic assessment." Some states have been trying to use performance assessments, portfolios, and outcomes-based assessments for purposes of accountability.

In this paper we examine some of the issues and challenges in gathering data for purposes of making accountability decisions for students with disabilities. In the first section we describe the alternative methods that are being used, and in the second section we describe the student population and accountability decision-making practices in representative states. We then shift in the third section to describe the kinds of issues State Education Agency (SEA) personnel encounter and the barriers they run into as they attempt to document educational results -- for students in general and especially for those who have disabilities. In the fourth section of the paper we identify the kinds of data SEA and national education policy personnel say would be needed to demonstrate that education works for students with disabilities.

Section five of the paper is devoted to a description of ways in which SEA personnel have been successful in overcoming barriers. We close the paper by recommending promising practices for making accountability decisions.

The points made in this paper are a result of our reading about and hearing descriptions of state practices. The latter was in the form of a working seminar jointly sponsored by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and the National Association of State Directors of

Special Education (NASDSE) in Chicago in September, 1993. The topic of the seminar was "Accountability for the Education of All Children." We convened State Directors of Special Education and State Assessment Coordinators from each of six states: Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, and West Virginia. Some of the information about barriers and ways to overcome them was drawn also from attendance at a special Forum on Educational Evaluation sponsored by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education in Alexandria, Virginia in August, 1993.

Alternative Ways to Demonstrate that Education Works for Students with Disabilities

The primary way in which national, state, and local educators currently make accountability decisions for students with disabilities is through child count and compliance monitoring. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) receive dollars based on numbers of students identified as students with disabilities. Sometimes straightforward allocations are made. Some states employ weighted pupil funding -- allocating different amounts of money based on students' special education conditions (e.g., mental retardation, autism, learning disability) or the severity of the disability. Funding may be removed as a consequence of the compliance monitoring process, an investigation of the extent to which LEA personnel are complying with state or national policy on delivery of services. LEAs and states must report the procedures they use to identify, certify, and deliver services to students, and national or state monitors arrive on the local scene to make judgments about whether state or national laws have been followed.

Monitoring of special education programs is based on the assumption that application of optimal inputs and processes will inevitably lead to positive outcomes for children. Yet, documenting the presence of a student in a program (child count), or the compliance of a program with regulations, does not tell us whether students are achieving the desired results.

We identified five alternative ways in which to demonstrate that education works for students with disabilities.

- Administration of norm-referenced tests
- Focus on results or outcomes
- IEP aggregation
- Secondary analysis of extant data
- Accreditation program

These are described in this section of the paper.

Administration of Norm-Referenced Tests

Norm-referenced assessment has remained an integral part of most state accountability systems. Some states have a long history of constructing their own state assessments and collecting and reporting data on pupil performance on their tests. Others use commercially available devices (such as the Stanford Achievement Test or Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) to make accountability judgments. And, of course, states make judgments about the relative performance of their students compared to students in other states based on NAEP results. Most students with disabilities are excluded from participation in state and national testing programs (McGrew, Thurlow, Spiegel, & Shriner, 1992).

Focus on Results or Outcomes

Many of the alternative accountability practices emphasize educational results rather than inputs and processes. The educational outcomes of all students may be measured against a set of standards (a derivative of a criterion-referenced approach). For example, Illinois expects the average performance of a school's students to be at or above a cut-score on their state assessment. Schools that fail to meet that standard run the risk of being placed on an "academic watch" list and possibly dismantled. Desired educational outcomes are specified, and outcomes may be measured by a number of indicators.

Other states have specified desired educational outcomes and use either norm-referenced or performance tests to make judgments about whether students are achieving the outcomes. When states engage in performance assessments, varying kinds of performance measures are being used. The most common form of performance tests are those that require construction rather than selection of a response (Coutinho & Malouf, 1993). Unlike most multiple choice exams, performance assessments are conducive to developing and assessing higher order skills such as creativity, problem solving, and cooperation. The most common performance assessments are writing samples.

Increasingly states are engaging in portfolio assessment in an effort to demonstrate that students are meeting outcomes or standards. Kentucky is currently using portfolio assessments as a third component of the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS). Writing and mathematics products are collected in student portfolios during each "accountability grade" (4, 8, and 12). Every student is expected to participate by submitting the best examples of their work. The Kentucky portfolios are expected to drive the future development of the state's accountability system. Representatives from the Maryland Department of Education reported that portfolio assessment also is a major approach being considered, especially at the high school level. According to Barton and Coley (1994), at least 30 states now have some form of nontradtional test items in their statewide assessment -- of these, nine states list portfolios.

IEP Aggregation

School districts are required by law to have on file an individual educational program (IEP) for each student with a disability. In the IEP, school personnel are to specify instructional objectives for the student and ways in which the objectives will be measured. Policymakers have begun to examine the possibility of collecting accountability data from IEPs. A data-base may be constructed to document the attainment of IEP goals or objectives. It is thought that accountability might be demonstrated by aggregating data on accomplishment of objectives. State personnel talk about the possibility of reporting the numbers of students who have accomplished specific objectives, or categories of objectives.

Secondary Analysis of Extant Data

Another way to demonstrate accountability would be to re-analyze extant data (data that already exist). Secondary data analyses may provide additional accountability information on the educational outcomes of students with disabilities. In some states, an extant data analysis may even allow student outcomes data to be disaggregated by type of disability. The viability of this approach necessarily depends on the existence and quality of previously-collected data (McGrew, Spiegel, Thurlow, Ysseldyke, Bruininks, Shriner, 1992).

Accreditation Program

A proposal made by some seminar participants for demonstrating accountability for educational outcomes of students with disabilities was to establish an accreditation program. A

few states, including Maryland and West Virginia, accredit schools for producing positive results in student achievement, low dropout rates and high attendence. An accreditation system may be used as a means for reporting student performance and distributing rewards and sanctions to schools and school districts. Professional organizations have successfully used similar methods for securing a high level of performance from both programs and students. Iowa currently accredits schools that demonstrate compliance with program standards during a three year onsite evaluation and district annual desk audits..

Student Population and Accountability Practices in Representative States

Information on the six states that participated in the seminar reflects the range of practices in states. The extent to which students with disabilities participate in and are identified in state accountability programs is summarized in Table 1. In Table 2, we provide a summary of the general characteristics of the accountability practices in each state. The following paragraphs describe the states in greater detail.

Illinois

Illinois is a state with a total school age population approaching 2 million students; 12.1 percent of the students in Illinois received special education services in 1990-91. Within the past few years, Illinois has increased its emphasis on state-level accountability for student achievement. State law in 1991 established standards, school compliance criteria, and local performance and improvement guidelines (the latter are measured by local assessments). The major state assessment tool, the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP), was changed in 1991 from a comparative assessment to a criterion-referenced assessment; it covers six basic learning areas.

Students with disabilities are required by a 1992 law to be included in the IGAP if they can take the test, or any component of it, with or without accommodations. Rules now are being prepared for determining which students will participate in IGAP, and with what accommodations. In addition to IGAP participation, students must participate in the local assessment or alternatives to the local assessment. At the same time, the effectiveness of IEPs are being examined in Illinois.

Iowa

Iowa is a state with a general education population of one-half million students; 11.2 percent of the students in Iowa received special education services in 1990-91. An existing data collection system was used as the basis for the current Iowa accountability program. This system includes information on initiatives for change, progress in addressing the national education goals, enrollment, finance, staff, program, and pupil outcomes. The system includes a wide range of measures, from standardized tests (Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Advanced Placement Programs) to various participation rates (e.g., dropout rates, attendance rates, participation in Advanced Placement courses). In addition to these data, Iowa collects information on program and financial accountability.

Students with disabilities have not, to date, been the focus of systematic efforts to include them in the regular data collection programs. Very little information is even available on whether students with disabilities are included in the pupil outcome measures. Data on participation (e.g., attendance, dropout rates, pursuing postsecondary training) may include students with disabilities.

Kentucky

Kentucky is a state with a general education population of more than one-half million students; 11.4 percent of the students in Kentucky received special education services in 1990-91.

Table 1

Participation and Identification of Students with Disabilities in State Accountability Programs

Illinois Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP)	Rules are being prepared for determining the participation of students with disabilities in IGAP, including guidelines for accommodations.
Iowa Annual Condition of Education Report	Very little information is available on the extent to which students with disabilities are included in the pupil outcome measures. Special education programs are monitored for state and federal compliance.
Kentucky Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS)	Under the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) all students participate in the accountability process. According to a set of eligibility guidelines, students with disabilities may either participate fully in the 3 component KIRIS assessment program (with or without accommodations) or complete the Alternate Portfolio Assessment. Data reported for schools and school districts may be disaggregated for students with disabilities by disability category at grades 4, 8 and 12.
Maryland Maryland School Performance Program	Students with disabilities are included in the student performance and supporting information measures. Students with disabilities are not identified in the Maryland School Performance Report.
Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP)	The extent to which students with disabilities participate in this student measure is reported in the context of exemptions. Parallel reports for special populations are distributed. Recent data shows that 97% of all students with disabilities participated in MSPAP.
Maryland Functional Testing Program	Students with disabilities are required to pass if seeking regular high school diploma. Students with disabilities are included, recent data indicates a participation rate of 90%.
Michigan Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP)	Guidelines for the inclusion of students with disabilities have been inconsistently implemented across the state.
Statewide Proficiency Test Aligned to the Michigan Core Curriculum	Schools are not required to report on the achievement of students with disabilities except in the case of specialized schools.
Governor's Report Card	It was not reported whether students with disabilities will be identified in this broad, general profile of education in the state. Special education data are not collected in the database.
West Virginia Performance Based Accreditation System	
• State annual performance measure	Students with disabilities and the programs that serve them are not identified separately in the reporting process.
• High quality standards	Special education programs are monitored for compliance.
West Virginia Special Education Evaluation Review System (WVSEERS)	LEAs must present a program evaluation plan that is in accordance with the guidelines of the WVSEERS in order to apply for state and federal funds.

Table 2

State Accountability Practices

	Illinois	Iowa	Kentucky	Maryland	Michigan	West Virginia
Student Accountability				X	X	
Program Accountability	X	X	X	X	X	X
State Outcomes, Standards and/or Indicators targeted	X		X	X	X	X
Data based on other: student present, participation, demographic; teacher characteristics	X	X	X	X	X	X
Data based on individual test performance		X	X	X	X	X
State guidelines for accommodations	O		X		X	X
Rewards and sanctions (accreditation)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Report data to constituents		X	X	X	X	
State database established			X	X	X	O
Inclusion in assessment	IEP		X	IEP	X	IEP

X Implemented
O Under development
IEP decision is made by IEP team and included on the student's IEP.

As part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990, Kentucky instituted a high stakes accountability system known as the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS). KIRIS measures progress toward six learning goals and seventy-five academic expectations, as well as assessing non-cognitive indicators such as attendance, dropout and retention rates, and proportion of students making successful transitions to work, postsecondary education, or the military. At this time, physical and mental health barriers to learning are not in the accountability indices. The inclusion of these is being reviewed. Learner outcomes are measured at grades 4, 8, and 12 in three ways: (a) a transitional assessment, which includes both multiple choice and open-response items, (b) performance events, which involve students working cooperatively and individually to solve real-life problems through simulations, and (c) portfolios, which are developed throughout the school year (currently in math and writing). Accountability for results is focused at the school level, with rewards (monetary) and the sanctions (ranging) from Level I, which requires the development of a school improvement plan, to Level III, which includes declaring a school to be "in crisis" and provided with technical assistance, and possible firing of administrators or staff dependent on changes over time in student achievement.

All students with disabilities are in KIRIS, but may participate in different ways depending on the severity of their disability. One way is for the student to participate in the three assessment components just as any other student would. A second way is for the student to participate in all three components with adaptations and modifications that are consistent with the instructional strategies specified in the student's IEP or 504 Plan and available to the student during classroom instruction. Assistive technology devices are considered to be a form of adaptations or modifications for the assessment. A third way is for the student to participate only in an Alternate Portfolio Assessment. The students participating in the third way are those with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities (not to exceed 2% of the population without monitoring). The third approach was first used during 1992-93, with scoring to be completed during Fall, 1993. The scores of students with disabilities, regardless of how they participate, are included in the data reported for schools and used in the accountability index. Data reported for schools can be disaggregated for students with disabilities by disability category.

Maryland

Maryland is a state with a general education population of three-quarter million students; 11.3 percent of the students in Maryland received special education services in 1990-91. Maryland holds students accountable for educational outcomes by requiring students to pass a functional test of reading, mathematics, writing, and citizenship in order to graduate. The Maryland School Performance Program was implemented in 1991 to hold schools accountable for student performance (including achievement, attainment, and participation) and reaching specified standards. These data, along with supporting information (student population characteristics, first graders with kindergarten experience, students receiving special programs or services, financial wealth, staffing ratios, instructional time, nationally norm-referenced achievement data), are published annually for each county and the state as a whole. Maryland has implemented the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) to measure higher order thinking at grades 3, 5, and 8. Standards for these assessments have been adopted and added to the Maryland School Performance Report. Schools will have to reach the designated standards by 1996. In the report, school improvement notes that were developed in response to the data also are documented.

Students with disabilities are included in the data presented in the Maryland School Performance Report, both in the student performance and the supporting information sections. The data for students with disabilities are not presented separately in the report. Each report also documents the numbers of students with disabilities who were exempted from the assessments. It is expected that these numbers will be consistent across counties, and that the numbers will reflect relatively small percentages of the student population. Parallel special education reports are also produced.

Michigan

Michigan is a state with a general education population of one and one-half million students; 9.5 percent of the students in Michigan received special education services in 1990-91. Accountability in Michigan is based on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and the 1990 Public Act 25. Although MEAP started in 1969, it has been modified over time to the point where it now collects information on student performance in reading, math, and science on a regular basis, and periodically in social studies and health (with a writing assessment in development). MEAP has become more high stakes through recent legislation (such as Public Act 25, which requires school districts to submit annual reports to constituents and data disks to the state department of education). In addition, students must meet established levels of performance to receive a state endorsement on their high school diplomas (and eventually, graduation itself may depend on performance on MEAP). Three additional statewide accountability mechanisms currently are being developed in Michigan. One is the development of assessments specifically to assess student proficiency on the Michigan Model Core Curriculum, which was part of Public Act 25. Also in Act 25 is the requirement that districts develop their own core curriculum for all students, participate in Michigan's accreditation program, and submit three-to-five year school improvement plan. The third accountability mechanism is the Governor's Report Card, which will document performance on the core curriculum assessments, as well as information on districts (such as personnel, staff ratios, revenues, expenditures per pupil, etc.).

Students with disabilities historically did not participate fully in MEAP, and districts did not consistently include students with disabilities in reports provided to the state. Although the state developed guidelines in 1992 for including students with disabilities in MEAP, the guidelines were inconsistently implemented across the state. The only accommodation that was available for MEAP was a Braille form of the test. As the MEAP has become more high stakes in nature, there has been greater interest in increasing the numbers of students with disabilities who participate. This, in turn, has generated greater focus on making accommodations for students with disabilities. The recent requirement that districts submit annual reports and data disks does not entail reporting or including students with disabilities, except for specialized schools. These schools, such as ones that provide only special education programs, must report the purpose of the school, the number of participating students, the procedures used to enroll them, and the extent to which goals of the school were met. Similarly, for the requirement that districts develop their own core curriculum, participate in the accreditation program, and submit improvement plans, districts are encouraged (but not mandated) to identify students with disabilities or the programs that serve them. The special education section of the state department of education does collect separate data on students with disabilities and the programs that serve them (e.g., financial, personnel, student count, and follow-up data). Special education in Michigan also has directed considerable resources to the identification of desired outcomes for each category of disability, trained school personnel on these outcomes and assessing them, and started to collect data on progress toward the outcomes.

West Virginia

West Virginia is a state with a general education population of just over one-quarter million students; 12.0 percent of the students in West Virginia received special education services in 1990-91. A performance based accreditation system was established in West Virginia under education reform legislation passed in 1988. It is a dual component system consisting of state established annual performance measures and standards for various aspects of the educational system (one area of focus being special education, where the focus is on the occurrence of program monitoring reviews and corrections of cited problems). The performance measures are used to collect data annually on student performance by grade level, and other indicators such as attendance, dropout rate, promotion rate, class size, operating expenses per pupil, and others. West Virginia's core curriculum of learning outcomes was recently replaced by instructional goals that cover all required programs of study and a criterion-referenced testing program designed to assess student attainment

of goals. Additional student achievement measures include a state-county writing assessment for grades 8 and 10, and the sample-based National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Data for students with disabilities are not reported separately for the annual performance measures. It is not clear to what extent students with disabilities currently participate in these assessments. For the new assessments, the inclusion of students with disabilities is determined on an individual basis by an Individualized Education Program Committee (IEPC).

Issues Encountered in Attempting to Gather Accountability Data

A number of issues related to gathering accountability data were raised during the Accountability for the Education of All Children Seminar. The major issue identified was **attitude**. The attitudes of educators, policymakers, parents, and students influence the effectiveness of an accountability system by permeating the resolution of additional kinds of issues such as:

- commitment
- agreeing on outcomes and standards
- source of responsibility for student learning
- inclusion in assessment
- deciding how to report information and what to report
- determining the role of the state
- using sanctions and rewards
- asking whether it is worth it
- fear
- local control
- curriculum-test alignment
- lack of agreement on how to measure complex skills
- students in non-graded classrooms
- absence of utility

By "attitudes" we mean the opinions people hold on the value of education and whether it is important for students to be successful at it, opinions about responsibility for social ills like lack of literacy and lack of "readiness" to enter school, views about the importance of data and data collection enterprises, and thoughts about how data should be reported (and whether they are anybody's business). Attitudes also influence views on who should be included in state and national assessments, and the kinds of data that should be reported on those who participate. The attitudes of those most directly involved in establishing an accountability system will be discussed in relation to the categories of issues listed above.

Commitment

One issue that nearly all states said was a major barrier to putting any accountability system in place was getting people committed to its importance. Apparently, there is a view in many school districts and states that it simply is not important to account for the results of education. If the general public holds this attitude, then schools have a difficult time getting their attention with data. If educators hold this attitude, then it is tough to get them serious about data collection.

Agreeing on Outcomes and Standards

State personnel recounted two issues in developing outcomes and indicators as a basis for making accountability decisions. Recently, there has been concern that considering all students, including those with disabilities, within the development of educational outcomes, and holding

educators accountable for all students achieving these outcomes, would result in lowered standards. These concerns have created a backlash against including all students in one set of standards. Critics argue that if we try to base accountability decisions on attainment of standards, and hold all students accountable for attaining standards, this will result in minimal competency testing. Retaining high expectations for all students without lowering standards remains a challenge.

> "The issue is developmental appropriateness. Avoiding a definition of minimums and reaching consensus could impede the accountability process. [In Maryland], we have teachers developing all the tasks, but they are the best teachers and may not fully recognize what is developmentally appropriate for all kids; middle class values can easily creep in to the system."
>
> - Robert Gabrys, Assistant State Superintendent
> Maryland Department of Education

A second issue related to setting standards or outcomes is that different states are defining standards differently. This could lead to inequity among states, where the quality of a student's education depends upon the state in which the student resides. The National Education Goals Panel and various professional organizations (e.g., National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) have presented models and criteria that probably will drive standards-setting activities at the National level. If Goals 2000 passes without much change, states will submit their standards for approval to the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC). Yet, state standards cannot be established until outcomes are defined. Defining outcomes for all students has met with mixed success. For example, as a result of resistance to the concept of outcomes-based education, Iowa recently failed to receive endorsement for its nine proposed outcome domains. This was due in large part to resistance from citizens opposed to outcomes-based education.

The issue of choosing outcomes includes ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with the goals and objectives. Therefore, reaching consensus on educational outcomes becomes an important and often extremely value-laden task. At this stage of developing an accountability system, individual attitudes become a critical issue. For example, educational outcomes that take into account mastery within post school domains such as transition to post secondary or vocational schooling, job skills, and independent living skills are emphasized by some stakeholders. A subgroup of these stakeholders stresses the importance of post-school outcomes within the social-emotional domain. The desire is for young adults exiting school to be responsible, independent and able to cope with stress and frustration. Yet, the nation is confronted with rising illiteracy rates and falling international standing in mathematics and science. The tension between emphasizing post-school transition skills and academic outcomes is most notable when examining the division between general and special education.

Source of Responsibility for Student Learning

In the past, the division between regular and special education created separate systems, each accountable for its own results. In fact, in some states it was thought that compliance monitoring is the accountability system for special education, while test performance was the accountability system for regular education.

School systems now are undergoing restructuring. One way in which many systems are doing so is by blurring the distinctions between regular and special education. As students with disabilities spend increasing time in general education settings, issues arise regarding responsibility

for what they learn. Special educators question the appropriateness of being held totally responsible for students who may spend only 30 minutes or less each day with a special educator.

Increasingly the regular education system is being asked to take responsibility for the results these students attain. Yet, there is no accountability system to reinforce this responsibility. In addition, there is in some instances an attitude that it is unreasonable and unfair to hold regular education or regular educators responsible for the outcomes achieved by students with disabilities.

Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Assessments and Adapting Measures to Enable them to Participate

Students with disabilities are under-represented in nearly all states' assessment systems. There are few if any incentives for increasing inclusion of students with disabilities in assessments. This practice may lead to sorting students and ranking some students as more valuable than others.

> "We can show that we're including more students with disabilities in the regular classrooms, and that they are coming [to school] more and behaving better, but [we have] no data on . . . their academic gains because we can't show that they are included in the performance exams."
>
> - Nancy Johnson, Director
> Office of Special Education
> West Virginia Department of Education
>
> "We don't exclude [students from assessments] except under [the] IEP. But in many instances, children are excluded unreportedly."
>
> - James Snyder, Assistant Division Chief
> Division of Instructional Services
> West Virginia Department of Education

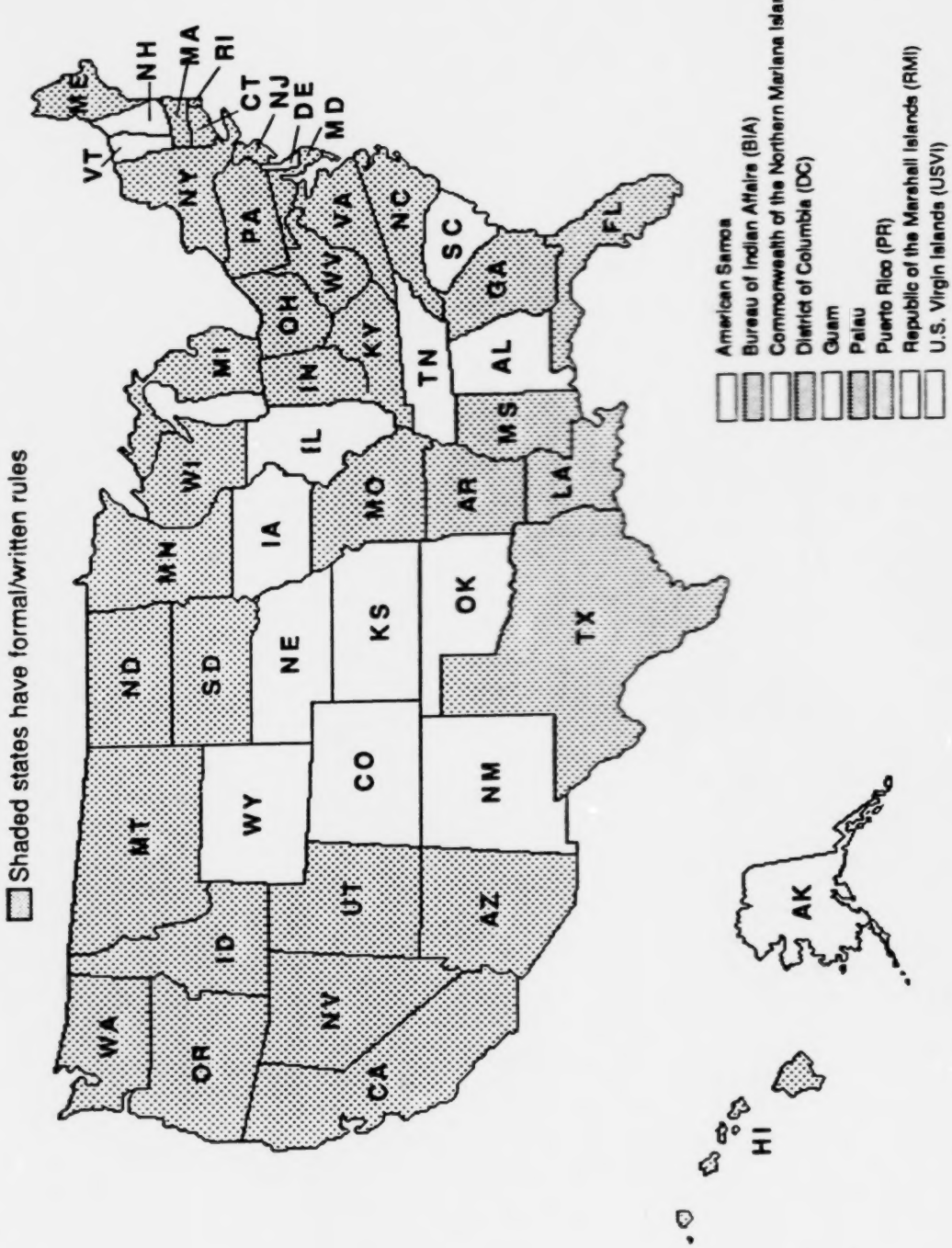
As states move to implement new ways of making accountability decisions, students with disabilities present a significant obstacle. It is tough to implement new forms of accountability practice. It is much tougher when all students must be included.

While most states have formal guidelines on who must be included in state and district assessments that are conducted for accountability or evaluation purposes (see Figure 1), the criteria in the guidelines are generally vague. So, it is little wonder that there is incredible variability in who is included and in the numbers of students included in assessments. This then leads to another issue, one of making fair comparisons. If different states, districts, or schools exclude different numbers or types of students, then unfair comparisons may be made among them.

The complementary issue to inclusion in assessment is adaptation of measures to accommodate students with disabilities. What kinds of accommodations are going to be allowed? To what extent do accommodations negatively affect technical adequacy? If Braille and large print versions are allowed, should an oral presentation of the test be administered? Many argue that the educational outcomes being assessed should dictate the appropriateness of an accommodation. In our discussions, some argued that curriculum should dictate accommodations. It is common practice in some states to allow students with disabilities to use accommodations that are specified in their IEP and used in daily instruction. Another issue then arises. If students with IEPs are allowed accommodations, why are not accommodations allowed for students who receive special instruction in Chapter I but not formally identified as having disabilities?

Figure 1

States with Formal/Written Rules for Inclusion in Assessments



How and What to Report

There are major differences of opinion on whether and how the test results of students with disabilities should be reported. First, it is very difficult to identify students with disabilities in many state data sets. Some states report data on students without indicating the numbers of students with disabilities who participated in the assessment. Others report data on students with disabilities separately. If data are reported on students with disabilities, there is disagreement on whether the students should be sorted by disability category. Some states gather and report data for separate categories of students, others simply report data on students with disabilities.

Determining the Role of the State

The data that the states determine to be necessary for establishing accountability will have a large effect on the data collection programs in local schools and districts. This is the basis for the fifth issue surrounding accountability practices, that of determining the role of the state. The infrastructure of public education needs to be evaluated so that the responsibility of state government in establishing an accountability program is well defined. Some states employ a "top-down" approach in which SEA personnel decide the kinds of data that will be collected and from whom they will be collected. In other states local districts decide what they will collect; this makes aggregation efforts more difficult.

Sanctions and Rewards

In addition to developing the accountability program, state government is often responsible for distributing sanctions and rewards. A number of issues arise when determining consequences for poor and favorable accountability results. The first is identifying the level of accountability. A number of options exist, including holding districts, schools, teachers or students accountable for student outcomes. The most frequently debated is whether individual students should be held accountable for their educational outcomes. Some argue that student accountability programs, such as requiring a student to meet a standard level of performance on a state assessment in order to graduate, improves students' motivation to learn. However, others suggest that holding students responsible for their educational outcomes is unfair to students with disabilities and students from disadvantaged homes.

Those who argue against policies that make graduation contingent upon passing an exam contend that there are other ways to demonstrate a student's value to society than a test score. Alternative assessment procedures may provide a more ecologically valid measure of students' abilities. However, these are recent additions to state accountability and must survive a 3 to 5 year trial period before results will be used to distribute sanctions and rewards. The importance of resolving the issue of level of accountability will depend upon the severity of the sanctions and rewards. For example, withholding a student's diploma on the basis of poor results on an accountability measure is less punitive than not allowing the student to graduate. Similarly, high stakes in the form of increased teacher wages have produced many unintended negative outcomes, including corruption in the assessments. Some examples of corruption include increased rates of referral to special education, teachers stealing the test answers, and teachers or administrators encouraging low performing students to remain at home during testing days. These examples suggest that high stakes accountability systems that are based on a single measure create situations that are not favorable to including students with disabilities in the accountability system.

A final issue related to determining the sanctions and rewards component of an accountability program is whether effective interventions automatically result from punitive measures. High stakes do not guarantee that educators will know how to remedy the problem of poor educational outcomes. Systems that employ punitive measures are making the assumption

that school personnel know how to achieve positive outcomes for students, but that there is no motivation for putting those practices into place.

Is It Worth It?

The unintended effects of sanctions and rewards based on accountability data is only one variable among many to be assessed.

> "We need to define why we're building an accountability system. Is the accountability effort worth all the resources unless school improvement/learning is the result?"
>
> - Robert Gabrys, Assistant State Superintendent
> Maryland Department of Education

The cost to local schools and districts in money and personnel time must be evaluated so that stakeholders are assured that resources are not being shifted away from direct services to fund the accountability program. The benefits of an accountability program must be demonstrated in order to retain continued support. An accountability program will be most effective if a system is established within the program to continuously monitor for unintended effects and to document that student results lead to instructional interventions and improved programs. This would require that the accountability program improves student performance rather than simply measures and documents student outcomes.

> "[We need an] assessment of the accountability system itself. Does the system itself over time have the right balances? Is this the right accountability system?"
>
> - Richard Steinke, State Director
> Division of Special Education
> Maryland Department of Education

Fear

One of the greatest barriers to establishing an accountability program is fear of accountability. This fear is derived from concerns about local autonomy, inclusion of students with disabilities, and loss of resources.

Mistrust is pervasive in education. Reform has the tendency to result in blaming rather than producing collaboration among educators. Mistrust exists not only within education, but also within constituent groups that have a vested interest in education, such as legislators, state boards, and advocacy groups. The strife among such groups is notable when the debate focuses on including students with disabilities in accountability programs.

Some educators are concerned that being held accountable for the performance of students with disabilities may lower their classroom standing and reduce the opportunity to meet established thresholds of success. The resistance to allowing students with disabilities to participate fully in the accountability program is supported by previous assessment systems that removed test scores of students with disabilities from the reporting process. Parents and advocates of students with disabilities may also be wary of an accountability system based on outcomes because of the potential risk of lost resources for direct services. Many believe that child count and monitoring

programs are an effective safeguard to ensure that students with disabilities access services. In short, a lack of public acceptance and understanding acts as a major barrier to implementing a more inclusive accountability program.

A third identified cause for fear of a state accountability program was a concern over loss of resources to local schools and districts due to collecting state accountability data. State data collection methodology is sometimes viewed as cumbersome when compared to the greater capacity for more sophisticated and streamlined data at the local and intermediate levels. Educators resent collecting data that appear to be ill-defined and fail to be consistently presented in meaningful reports. The high cost of collecting and analyzing data is a barrier at many levels of governance. The initial expense of streamlining the data collection process, including establishing a comprehensive data base and continued local input, must be borne by state funds. The expense of collecting and analyzing data will increase for accountability systems that disaggregate data for special groups of students. This added expense may reduce an accountability program's ability to identify the outcomes of students with disabilities and the effectiveness of the programs that serve them. An additional barrier to disaggregating data is that students do not easily fit into one category or receive services from only one program. The amount of information collected on child characteristics required to resolve the issue of identifying special education students and providing the contextual information demanded by many is difficult to determine and very expensive to collect.

Local Control

Most states have a long history of local control over developing and implementing education programs. A state accountability program may be viewed as a threat to this local autonomy. For example, Iowa State Director Dwight Carlson postulated that state-defined outcomes failed to gain the necessary support because state outcomes were viewed as a threat to local autonomy. State educational outcomes were feared to be a step toward a state-mandated curriculum and it was thought that data collected in these outcome domains would be misused to justify closing small rural schools, and advancing other political agendas. A state accountability program will constitute a major change in policy for Iowa because it does not even have state-defined outcomes or competency testing for teachers and students. In an effort to retain local support, particularly from the teacher unions, and local autonomy, state policymakers may hesitate to mandate reform policies necessary for an effective accountability program.

Curriculum-Test Alignment

The lack of alignment of curriculum and instruction with the accountability program is a barrier to implementing an accountability program. A difficulty associated with increasing the accountability program's connection to the curriculum and instruction is choosing the factor to modify first: outcomes, assessment, or curriculum and instruction. Martha Fields, Executive Director of NASDSE, recalled a failed attempt to simultaneously reach consensus on outcomes, design innovative curriculum and develop alternative assessments during the time she was in Maryland. This approach was met with opposition as exemplified by newspapers that asserted that time needed to modify all these elements of an accountability program was an attempt to slow down implementation.

Kansas took a different approach but did not meet with better success when they adjusted the assessments but not the curriculum to the NCTM standards. A subsequent decrease in test scores resulted in an attack on the construct validity of the assessment rather than a modification of the curriculum. These examples illustrate the tension between a linear approach to implementing an accountability program, in which assessments are designed to collect baseline data on student performance in each outcome domain, and a more circular approach to implementing an accountability program in which there is a focus on instructional validity, outcomes and

assessments simultaneously. The latter method is a more bottom-up process and requires continuous readjustment of each component toward a united, efficient, outcomes-based accountability program.

"I want to believe that if you have school accountability which identifies clear outcomes, includes authentic assessment such as portfolio assessments and the development of products and performances, high teacher expectations and embraces diversity and the belief that all children can learn, the instruction and curriculum will create a learning environment which motivates students to perform at higher levels. Assessement, curriculum, and instruction must begin to be seen as interactive."

- Nancy LaCount, Branch Manager
Kentucky Department of Education
Division of Professional Development
Instructional Strategies Branch

Lack of Agreement on How to Measure Complex Skills

A growing dissatisfaction with traditional assessments has led to increased interest in alternative assessments designed to measure higher-order skills. Stakeholders are interested in measuring students' abilities to solve complex problems, and demonstrate other higher-order skills, such as observation, creativity, synthesis and interpersonal skills that are not easily measured by traditional assessments. With the increasing popularity of cooperative learning curricula and instruction, students are thought to be acquiring greater skills in these domains. Yet, there are few data to verify this assumption. By requiring students to construct rather than choose from a set of responses, higher-order skills may be assessed as well as students' abilities to generalize skills to different, more authentic contexts. However, disagreement arises when a specific performance assessment must be chosen. A lack of consensus on a dependent measure for demonstrating education's effectiveness in developing complex skills is a barrier to implementing an accountability program. A point of contention derives from balancing the measures' potential construct validity and its reliability and cost. Furthermore, developing performance assessments that allow all children to participate requires extensive knowledge of the variety of skills mastered by children with disabilities. In addition, new assessments arouse anxiety over whether curriculum and instruction are developing the skills assessed by alternative assessments.

Students in Non-graded Classrooms

One of the barriers seminar participants identified to establishment of accountability systems is the fact that many students with disabilities are enrolled in non-graded classrooms. Even for students mainstreamed in graded classrooms, there exists conflict over whether accommodations provide students with disabilities adequate means to demonstrate their abilities. Furthermore, some argue that accommodations, such as extra time and alternative presentations, violate the technical adequacy of the assessment. Disagreement about which, and in what manner, students should be included in the accountability program presents a barrier to be overcome.

No Utility

Accountability programs face the possible risk (particularly if they include a lot of contextual data) of presenting information that no one understands and that no one uses to improve

education. Most educators have an aversion to spending valuable preparation time on managing paper work if they do not see the activity as useful.

Data Needed to Demonstrate that Education Works for Students with Disabilities

Educators are being asked to demonstrate that education is working for students with disabilities. A discussion of the kinds of data it would take to demonstrate that education is working for these students generated three categories of data: input, process and outcomes.

Input

The cost of providing services to students with disabilities is critical to understanding the effectiveness of education. Schools collect data on a variety of input variables in order to better target limited resources and monitor violations of equity in education. For example, the supporting information component of Maryland's accountability program collects input data on resources including: money spent per pupil, staffing ratios, and instructional time. Information is also collected on student characteristics such as the percentage of first graders with kindergarten experiences, student mobility among schools, number of students with limited English proficiency, and number of students enrolled in Special Education, Chapter 1 and free/reduced meal programs. Data on student characteristics are collected in an effort to recognize the variety of student inputs that influence the context within which learning occurs. It is hoped that collecting information on student characteristics and allocation of the educational system's resources will provide guidance for future budgeting, and an index of difficulty of the education task within a specific building.

Process

There has been increasing concern that every student is provided with the opportunity to learn. So, educators indicate that one piece of information needed is the extent to which students with disabilities receive an opportunity to learn. Typically, they refer to exposure to curriculum, time spent in school, time spent in regular education settings, or dollars spent on education, as aspects of opportunity to learn and, in turn, of the educational process. We will not debate the definition of opportunity to learn, since it is the subject of a separate policy direction paper (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Shin, 1994). Some believe that states should be collecting data on the extent to which students with disabilities are integrated into regular education.

Yet another process variable that educators would like to see measured as one indicator of whether education is working for students with disabilities is some index of the expectations for performance held by individual students' teachers. And, along with this notion, educators suggest that we ought to know the extent to which IEPs translate into instruction. They indicate that one source of information on how well education is working for students with disabilities would be the number of students who meet IEP objectives.

Outcomes

Seminar participants told us that the kind of data most critical to making decisions about whether education is working for students with disabilities is data on outcomes. They said that they would believe education was working if students were becoming proficient in academic and functional skills, achieving valued social and emotional outcomes, and generalizing what they learn in school to everyday life. Seminar participants thought that the long term benefit of special education might be documented through longitudinal studies of students' successful transition to adult life. They thought that data on student transition might be collected from follow-up studies of student and parent satisfaction levels, community impact studies including such areas as

employment, independent living, community participation, and an analysis from the private sector of the extent to which our "product" meets the needs of the labor market. The ultimate goal of collecting this type of outcomes-based accountability data is to establish a continuous process loop that allows for a comparison between past and current graduates of special education programs.

> "[We need to ask]working relative to what? We don't know what others who have gone through the system are doing. We need a comparative."
>
> - Jeananne Hagen, Assistant Bureau Chief
> Bureau of Special Education
> Iowa Department of Public Instruction

Overcoming Barriers to Implementing New Forms of Accountability Decision Making: Approaches States Have Used

Seminar participants discussed several alternative approaches that states have taken to overcome barriers to accountability systems. Among the ways discussed were:

- staff development
- stakeholder involvement
- funding
- curriculum assessment alignment
- reporting data
- mandating data collection
- using rewards and sanctions
- gaining consensus on outcomes
- building a comprehensive database
- developing guidelines on inclusion and accommodations
- shifting accountability practices
- disaggregating data
- providing incentives
- accrediting local school systems
- learning from other states

Each of these is discussed briefly here.

Staff Development

Several states have attempted to use staff development to get people committed to the collection of outcomes data and to help them understand the importance of gathering accountability data. These states contend that one of the greatest sources of fear of accountability systems is a lack of technical knowledge about the systems and how to implement them.

The perceptions of teachers are critical to attaining commitment to an accountability system. Staff development at the pre-service level is recommended. However, this may require the state to allocate portions of its limited resources to teacher training. A staff development program must also take into account existing local accountability structures. A program that builds upon local structures and offers teachers methods for collecting data useful for instructional purposes is most likely to build lasting commitment to a state accountability program.

The content of staff development programs should include technical information and encourage a shift in paradigm from inputs and processes to outcomes. Educators must have technical knowledge of administering and scoring alternative assessments to be able to assist in the development of a data collection system. This is a critical issue because staff input is a strong determinant of the commitment and sense of ownership that an accountability program receives, and a technically sound assessment program is a prerequisite for a successful accountability program. However, the goal of establishing meaningful outcomes and indicators of progress toward these outcomes for all students should not be overshadowed by technical concerns. A balance must be struck between collecting data that are statistically adequate and useful for improving the quality of education. The resolution of this issue requires a commitment on the part of the technical review committees, teachers and other stakeholders to measuring outcomes rather than solely recording input or monitoring process.

The success Maryland has experienced with performance assessment is due in part to the presence of a teacher training consortium in all 24 school systems. The expense and commitment required to provide adequate training on designing, administering and scoring alternative assessments were identified as barriers to implementing new forms of accountability. Nancy LaCount highlighted the importance of local input into Kentucky teacher training programs. Kentucky uses cluster leaders to train locally. Teachers are included in the design of assessment tasks and scoring portfolios in Kentucky. This not only facilitates stakeholder buy-in and involvement, but also serves as professional development activities. Kentucky also has professional development consortiums and a network of assessment coordinators in local school districts. The goal of this program is to build larger and larger pathways of awareness and sources of support for teachers participating in state performance assessments. The results have created multiple-levels of knowledgeable stakeholders of the accountability program. The commitment to the program is indicated by teachers' willingness to volunteer their time for training other teachers.

Teacher training is also critical for encouraging the inclusion of all children in the accountability program. In the Michigan schools, personnel participate in various staff development activities designed to encourage accountability for all students. At the state level, an advocacy approach has been used during meetings of the Michigan Department of Education staff to encourage an inclusive approach to accountability. Including representatives of special education in the design of alternative assessments and teacher training programs was recommended for promoting awareness and ensuring the feasibility of the inclusion of all students in the accountability program. The separate regular and special education systems may lead regular education teachers to design assessments that are not developmentally appropriate for students with disabilities. Special education instructors were involved in designing Maryland performance assessments. Additional guidance has been obtained by Maryland and Kentucky from higher education programs.

<u>Get Stakeholder Involvement up Front, Often in the Form of LEA/SEA Task Forces</u>

Two approaches to reducing the barriers of perceived threat to local autonomy were discussed. Each solution addressed the amount of control local educators exert over developing and accessing accountability data elements.

One approach is to use the intermediaries, such as SEAs and LEAs, to design and implement state accountability data collection programs. For example, West Virginia requires LEAs to provide data that identify an area of concern in order to receive federal discretionary funds. A restriction on the type of data acceptable for this purpose requires that the data be in accordance with the guidelines of the West Virgina Special Education Evaluation Review System (WVSEERS). However, LEAs soon discovered that existing data did not provide the type of information needed for documenting the performance of students with disabilities and the programs

that serve them. As a result, LEAs were placed in the position of developing methods for collecting performance data needed to receive additional funds.

Similarly, Iowa formed a board of directors, consisting of local AEAs (area educational agencies) and state department staff to develop one system of special education data collection for their state. Thus, the ownership of the data collection system in Iowa is at the intermediate unit level for special education.

A second approach to reducing the fear that a state accountability program will compromise local autonomy is to include input from a wide range of professionals into the development of the data collection program. Michigan formed a coalition of representatives from various national, state and local groups, including two teachers unions, the curriculum association, and the national association of secondary principals, to work together and mediate the development of data collection procedures. Including curriculum developers in the design of assessment procedures was considered crucial to aligning a state accountability program to the curriculum.

Similarly, Maryland emphasized the role of teachers in designing assessments. A group of teachers played an active part in developing performance assessments. The assessment program was implemented in September of 1992 and the teachers met again in December to evaluate and improve the assessment program. The end result was a paper disseminated to all of the teachers. State director, Robert Gabrys, stated that the extensive teacher input reduced staff fear of performance assessment because the assessment process was no longer viewed as solely state controlled. Furthermore, there is evidence, including support from the teachers union, that the emphasis upon teacher input will increase long term commitment to performance assessments. Teachers have responded favorably to designing and administering performance assessments, as well as to evaluating the results of student performance on these measures. Additional comments by teachers indicate that they do not perceive a significant loss of instruction time due to the performance assessment program.

> "More decisions on assessments are made by curriculum people, not just testing people. That forced the alignment to occur. Curriculum and assessment people sit in the same room and are forced to come to a consensus."
>
> - Robert Gabrys, Assistant State Superintendent
> for School Performance
> Maryland Department of Education

Parents, students and advocacy groups also are important in building local commitment to an inclusive accountability program. Kentucky has used mass media, including television, to increase public awareness and support among stakeholders for their accountability program. Michigan has opened its training centers to parents and has published a brochure emphasizing the inclusive nature of Michigan educational reform. Similarly, every Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) task force includes a parent component that examines the data to be collected and recommends solutions to overcoming barriers to collecting these data.

Fund LEAs for Data Collection

In some states funding is provided to LEAs to enable and encourage them to gather data on student outcomes. While this practice is not widespread, SEA personnel do talk about the possibility of witholding small amounts of the funds that are allocated to LEAs and making the distribution of those funds contingent on collection of outcomes data.

Align Curriculum with Assessment

SEA personnel recognize that one of the barriers to collection of data on outcomes is the lack of alignment between assessment and curriculum. Test developers at many corporations are busy matching their tests and test items to state competencies and outcomes. The practice ranges from generic matching to very specific cataloging of items corresponding to specific instructional objectives.

Report Data on Student and School Outcomes

Awareness of the importance of accountability assessments is increased when the results of the assessments are published in formal reports or released to the media. The manner in which results of accountability assessments are reported may also increase awareness. Maryland released the results of its state assessment to the press and emphasized that the goals that have been set are goals for the year 2000. Student performance is reported as baseline information on the magnitude of student accomplishments relative to the year 2000 goals.

Similarly, data reporting has been used to overcome barriers to including students with disabilities in the accountability program. Maryland's school performance reports include the number of students with disabilities who were exempted from each measure. This information is intended to encourage advocacy groups to question local inclusion policies. In addition, occurences of inordinate numbers of exemptions are investigated by the state. Excluding students who do not meet the necessary requirements for an exemption (children for whom state standards are determined to not be appropriate) is also discouraged by assigning zeros as the scores for all exempted students.

Mandate Collection of Accountability Data

In Kentucky, the inclusion of students with disabilities in the accountability program is mandated. All students participate in the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) in one of three ways: (a) participate fully in all assessments with no modifications; (b) participate in all assessments with accommodations as specified by IEPs; (c) participate in Alternative Portfolio Assessments. Students with disabilities who meet the criteria for the Alternate Portfolio Assessment are exempt from the transitional multiple-choice, open response assessment, performance events, and mathematics and writing portfolios completed by all other students. They complete an alternate portfolio that is included in the accountability program, as are any other student assessment results. The students who meet the criteria for Alternate Portfolio Assessments generally have moderate to severe cognitive disabilities and comprise only 1-2% of the total student population. The criteria for participation in the Alternative Portfolio Assessment were established by a program advisory of the Disabilities and Diversity committee, which was established to review issues and make recommendations for the development, implementation and inclusion of students with disabilities in the KIRIS accountability program. The program advisory is responsible for communicating policy decisions to local schools and school districts.

Additional support for including all students in the Kentucky accountability program includes peer support for teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities, attempting to align the curriculum and instruction to the Alternate Portfolio System, and expanding the range of appropriate transitions identified by the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) to be more inclusive of transitions appropriate for students with disabilities. A final method used by Kentucky to include students with disabilities in the accountability system was the development of a statute that states "schools shall expect a high level of achievement of all students," thus providing the legal basis for high standards for all students. These efforts provide support to all levels of

accountability and increase the likelihood that the mandated policy of inclusion will become a reality.

Federal Mandate or Rewards and Sanctions

Participants did not approve of redefining federal special education funding programs to allocate resources contingent upon whether students meet state or school-established standards. It was thought that programs serving students with severe disabilities might suffer from this type of funding policy. Furthermore, it was argued that it is doubtful that the federal government could efficiently and effectively regulate the progress of students with disabilities. In addition, it was suggested that given the separate structures of federal education agencies, federal involvement in accountability programs might perpetuate the division between special and regular education. Overall, the federal government is viewed as a macro structure that should be responsible for encouraging inclusive accountability programs through legislation (such as Goals 2000 which calls for the development of assessment procedures that include all students) and by example (such as increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities in national assessment programs such as NAEP). Distributing sanctions and rewards based upon student performance was recognized as a state responsibility.

"Making the availability of federal funds contingent on students meeting outcomes would not be equitable and very difficult to regulate"

- Richard Baldwin, State Director
Special Education Services
Michigan Department of Education

Gain Consensus on Outcomes

One of the barriers to getting new accountability practices into place is the lack of consensus on outcomes and indicators. Participants at the working session thought that they would have a better chance of implementing new accountability practices if there was consensus on outcomes and indicators. They supported efforts to develop a conceptual model of outcomes and indicators and the development of a consistent system for documenting student outcomes. Once agreed upon, outcomes and indicators need to be incorporated into the curriculum. Kentucky used teachers from across the commonwealth, representing various disciplines, to develop a curriculum framework based on Kentucky's learning goals and expectations. Schools are revising their curriculum and instructional strategies to facilitate Kentucky students attaining the goals and expectations.

Build a Comprehensive State Data Base

In some states there has been a move to develop comprehensive state data bases that include contextual information as well as outcomes data. Some states include in their data bases individual and local evaluation reports that are synthesized through meta-analysis procedures. When states have data from multiple agency evaluations of schools and services, they are able to use those data to plan future services and to influence policy development, budgeting and legislative actions.

Develop State Guidelines on Inclusion and Accommodation in Testing

Most states do not mandate the inclusion of students with disabilities in testing because they lack the structures to enforce such a policy and the programs to provide the technical support

necessary for ensuring success. However, many participants in the seminar on accountability identified the development of state guidelines for inclusion and accommodation practices as a critical step to overcoming the barriers to inclusion. Of the states in the seminar, some (Maryland, Illinois, and West Virginia) leave the decision of inclusion in assessment to IEP teams to determine on an individual basis. Others (Kentucky and Michigan) provide specific guidelines delineating which students participate in specific components of the accountability program. The latter policy is more advantageous for constructing a true representation of student achievement within a state. Leaving inclusion decisions to IEP teams increases the likelihood that students with disabilities will be inconsistently included in state accountability programs. State guidelines for inclusion will be most effective if they are accompanied by state guidelines for accommodations. Currently, of the states participating in the seminar Kentucky, Michigan and West Virginia provide guidelines for accommodation practices.

Shift Accountability Practices to Hold Systems Responsible for Producing Environments in Which Students Can and Will Learn

Often, outcomes accountability programs are put into place without careful consideration of who is responsible for attainment of outcomes. Often, the focus in accountability practices is on attainment of a set of outcomes. In some states there is discussion of holding districts accountable for producing environments in which students can and will achieve desirable outcomes. Goals for improved achievement are set and progress toward the goals is monitored.

Disaggregate Data

An approach to overcoming the barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities in accountability programs is to disaggregate data for students with disabilities (either by category or across categories). This practice would allow the effectiveness of special education programs to be evaluated. In Kentucky, data can be disaggregated for studetns with disabilities by disability category at grades four, eight and twelve. Data on students receiving special education in Maryland could be disaggregated from students not eligible for special education services. All information is reported to stakeholders in aggregate format, but disaggregated information is available. Ensuring an equitable education requires collecting data on the progress of groups of students (including special education and disadvantaged students) toward meeting standards.

Disaggregating data for students with disabilities may revolve around establishing different assessments. For example, Michigan is developing a set of outcome indicators for each of 12 disability categories. However, the general consensus of those at our seminar supported collecting data on the performance of students with disabilities from state accountability programs rather than developing separate assessment procedures for different categories. This would resolve the problem of artificially placing students into categories when their abilities and performance fall on a wide continuum. Furthermore, students with disabilities would be encouraged to work toward the same standards of performance as regular education students. This effort would be evident in developing IEPs that outline goals for students that are congruent with state outcomes. IEPs may also include data collection procedures for assessing student progress toward these goals. This information could be collected from IEPs and reported in disaggregated format with the results of state assessments.

Provide Incentives

Creating incentive programs was identified as one solution to the barriers to implementing new forms to accountability. For example, providing more focused technical assistance programs may act as an incentive for educators to account for student performance and to include students with disabilities in that accounting. Incentives to include all students in a new accountability program may be derived from state-distributed sanctions and rewards. The first step to

implementing a high stakes accountability program is to identify constraints and sources of resources.

A system of sanctions and rewards should be sensitive to the availability of resources and emphasize continuous progress toward standards. For example, Illinois has teams evaluate the appropriateness of the improvement plans developed by local schools. Then, if the school improvement plan fails to result in positive student gain, some of the school's staff is replaced. Ultimately, the entire existence of the school, as well as the principal, superintendent, and school board's jobs may be terminated.

Accredit Local School Systems

A more common approach to distributing consequences for school performance on state accountability assessments may be to accredit schools for creating an environment in which all children progress toward state standards and outcomes. Of the states represented at the seminar, Michigan and West Virginia apply similar methods for encouraging participation in the accountability program. In West Virginia, accreditation is based on unannounced site visits that investigate deficiencies in a school's annual report. Accreditation and local reports provide schools with public recognition of good work.

Learn from Other States

A final method identified in the seminar for overcoming the barriers to implementing a new system of accountability is to learn from other states about programs that have been successful. Specifically, individuals involved in developing and implementing accountability programs would benefit from specific ideas and examples of effective programs in other states, rather than from an overview of how accountability systems can be developed. It is hoped that this report, along with the recent NCEO survey of state data managers (see Ysseldyke, Vanderwood, & Reschly, 1994) will provide this concrete information, as well as inspire others to share their successes with accountability.

Recommended Practices

There should be little doubt that the collection of accountability data is an important activity. The activity is critical to the continued funding and support of services for students with disabilities. The activity is important to provision of data used in making policy decisions. And, it is clear that child count data, while interesting and important, do not begin to meet the needs of those who want to improve instructional programs and educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

It is one thing to recognize the importance of changing practices in the collection of accountability data. Yet, people will not do so just because it is a good idea to do so. Careful thought must be given to the creation of incentives for people to change the ways in which they gather data. Here we have much to learn from the experiences of the state education agency personnel who participated in our seminar.

First, any data collection program put in place must make sense to those who are gathering data. And, it probably is not a good idea to invent new data collection requirements. Rather, efforts need to be made to involve stakeholders from the outset in deciding precisely the kinds of data to be collected and the methods to be used. We recommend that an outcomes-based approach be used and that the Self-Study Guide to the Development of Educational Outcomes and Indicators (Ysseldyke & Thurlow, 1993) or a similar document be used to help SEA and LEA personnel reach agreement on valued outcomes and kinds of data to be collected. It will not be possible at the outset to gather data on all outcomes, but even a partial system will be better than none.

SEA personnel should consider establishing incentives for data collection. The approach used in New Jersey could be followed. There, SEA personnel hold a competition among districts for funds to support data collection. If SEA personnel are serious about data collection, then they need to allocate resources to this activity.

If educational personnel in states are to spend time gathering data on educational outcomes for students with disabilities, then they need training in how to do so. Staff development is critical to the accountabiulity process.

Finally, new methods for collecting accountability data will be effective only if the data are actually used in the process of making policy decisions and there is evidence that this was done. School personnel are not about to become excited about the collection of data that are put on the shelf rather than put to good use. Usually, for people to see that data were put to good use requires that a report be developed to showcase the data.

There is, we think, an overall goal to the standards-setting process. That goal is one of developing broad, meaningful outcomes for all children that allow for the variety of challenges faced by students with disabilities. One determinant of the reporting procedure will be the audience. Data collected from an accountability assessment may be reported to the school's teachers, surrounding neighborhood, local district, or state. Each purpose requires different information. Teachers benefit the most from accountability reports that are clear and directly related to instruction. Students and parents should be able to access pertinent information with little difficulty and prior knowledge of statistics. Data reported at each level of governance is likely to vary, with data reported to the state consisting of only a portion of all the data collected by local schools and school districts.

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